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CAVALRY ARMAMENT.

Memorandum by the Commander-in-Chief.

THE question as to the manner in which our cavalry should be armed is of such vital importance to the efficiency of that branch of the Service, that I have thought it desirable to analyse the part taken by cavalry in the wars of the past century, in order to satisfy myself whether the sword, or lance, or the fire-arm had proved the most effective weapon.

The action of cavalry in the field falls under three headings:—

1. Cavalry *v.* cavalry.
2. Cavalry *v.* infantry and artillery.
3. Cavalry in pursuit.

CAVALRY *v.* CAVALRY.

In this phase of combat shock tactics have been constantly employed since Waterloo, viz., in the Sikh and Punjab Campaigns, during the Indian Mutiny, in the American War of Secession, in the wars between Prussia and Austria, in 1866, and between France and Prussia, in 1870, and although they cannot be said to have ever been decisive, or to have inflicted demoralising losses, they have been successful enough to show that if two cavalries, both employing *l'arme blanche*, are opposed to one another, the stronger body, if well handled, will soon gain the upper hand.

But it is in accordance with common sense, and it is also made clear by history, that the weaker cavalry, as soon as it realises its enemy's superiority, will seek to readjust the balance by having recourse to fire.

Now fire has had a most marked influence on cavalry tactics. Every improvement in the fire-arm and the gun has been made the application of Napoleonic tactics, viz., the charge of great masses with *l'arme blanche*, more difficult. During the war in Austria in 1866, and the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, the cavalry masses were held back at such a distance from the front of the battle that they were unable to take advantages of opportunities, and their advance under the long-ranging fire of the breech-loaders and rifled guns was practically impossible. Moreover, while the battles were in progress (waged over a much wider front than in the days of Napoleon), the cavalry gradually broke up in order to guard the flanks and cover the communications, and could not again be assembled in their original strength.

The action of the cavalry, then, when opposed only by cavalry, or by cavalry and artillery, was confined to charges made by squadrons, regiments, and in rare cases by brigades.

Nevertheless, the cavalry on both sides still clung to the tradition of *l'arme blanche*, and made very little use of fire, with the consequence that the result was but slight. The German cavalry, indeed, did good work in reconnoitring during the first phase of the 1870 campaign; but the French cavalry never attempted to stop them, and in the latter phase, when the French franc-tireurs formed a screen for the infantry columns in rear, the German cavalry found themselves so powerless that they were compelled to arm themselves with captured rifles.¹

In America, on the other hand, the cavalry leaders very early recognised the increase of power to be gained by arming their men with a rifle in addition to the sabre. Their tactics against both cavalry and infantry were a combination of fire and shock, and their achievements were far more brilliant than those of the Germans in 1870. The cavalry was not only employed to capture and hold strategical positions, to cover flank marches, to delay wide turning movements, and to cut the communications in far-reaching ranks, but as rear-guards and advance-guards.

Compared with the Germans, who made very little use of fire, the Americans were far more independent, more dangerous in attack, and strategically, owing to their capacity for defence, distinctly more effective.

It must be remembered that fire has greatly increased in range, in accuracy, and in intensity since 1870. Also, that whilst no improvement, either in horse, sabre or lance can be looked for, in the immediate future, it is acknowledged that still further perfection in the power of the modern rifle is practically certain. Cavalry are now accompanied by a much more powerful horse artillery, and even on the Continent the men carry a long-ranging carbine. What was difficult in 1870 is many times more difficult to-day; and if we consider the enormous volume of fire which can be developed by quick-firing guns, maxims, and pom-poms, we cannot fail to realise:—

1. That cavalry is absolutely certain to make full use of those potent auxiliaries, even against cavalry.
2. That the advance and deployment of great masses of cavalry is even more impracticable than heretofore.

The conclusion to be deduced, therefore, is that when large bodies of cavalry employed to cover the fronts of their armies encounter each other fire will be the main factor, but that small bodies, from their being able to act without being observed, may occasionally effect surprises and make use of shock tactics with great effect.

It is not uninteresting to observe that the greatest generals of the early part of the century foresaw the enormous strategic value of

¹ There is a significant remark as to the value of fire-arms to be found in the French translation of the Austrian official account of the campaign of 1866. The translator puts the following note to the Battle of Königgrätz:—"An Austrian officer of the highest rank writes to me as follows:—'Our cavalry is the finest, the best trained, the bravest force you could possibly have, and has no superior. We knew well that we should always have had the upper hand in our encounters with the Prussian cavalry if the latter had not always been supported by infantry (i.e., fire). It was to such tactics, which our cavalry despised, that the success of the Prussian cavalry was due.'"

cavalry which should be armed with an effective fire-arm. Wellington, in his despatches, remarks that Napoleon often made use of his cavalry to seize positions in advance of the army, and he regrets that the English cavalry, as it did not carry carbines, could not be employed in the same way.

Napoleon's opinions are worth quoting *in extenso*:—In order that cavalry may be independent in all situations he (Napoleon) declared that a fire-arm is indispensable.

"It is universally conceded that the cuirassiers have difficulty in using their carbines, but, on the other hand, it seems absurd that 3,000 or 4,000 brave men should be exposed to being surprised in their cantonments or stopped in their marches by a couple of light companies. . . . I cannot reconcile myself to seeing 3,000 men, picked troops, liable to be overwhelmed by any partisan leader during a popular rising, or in a surprise by light troops, or to be arrested on their march by a few good sharpshooters behind a brook or house. It is my wish that every man should have a musket, even if it be only a very short carbine, carried in the manner most convenient to the cuirassiers, it is all the same to me Place, therefore, some proposal before me so that these 3,000 men may not have to depend on infantry to protect them in cantonments, and that they may be able to clear their way if any infantry inferior to them in numbers attack them As to the lancers, see whether we could not manage to arm them with a carbine in addition to their lances; and should this be impossible, at least one-third of each troop ought to be armed with carbines.¹

CAVALRY *v.* INFANTRY AND ARTILLERY.

Cavalry has never been able to beat staunch infantry except by surprise, and now it is almost impossible for cavalry to approach near enough to the enemy's firing line to effect a surprise, except under unusually advantageous conditions of the ground.

Moreover, it is seldom that infantry will be unsupported by artillery and machine-guns even in retreat; and we must also take into account that the infantry soldier has much greater confidence in his magazine rifle than he had in the musket or even the muzzle-loading rifle.

It may be argued from certain occurrences in the war in South Africa, that a mass of cavalry, if boldly managed, might break through infantry holding a position. But, as a general rule, infantry will have behind it several echelons in the shape of supports and reserves, and will possibly be protected by hasty entrenchments. It will not consist, as in South Africa, of a thin line of skirmishers disposed at wide intervals, and the cavalry which attempts to break through properly posted infantry will probably meet with a worse fate than did the French cavalry in 1870 at Woerth, Vionville, and Sedan.

At Woerth a French brigade charged a line of infantry among vineyards and was literally destroyed.

¹ It is a strange commentary on this opinion of the great soldier Napoleon that, 74 years later, when the 9th Lancers were ordered to join me in Kuram, their only arms were sword and lance. They had to be hurriedly supplied with carbines, and put through a course of musketry.

A French division charged a line of infantry and guns which was advancing across the open. The cavalry lost over 50 per cent. and effected nothing.

At Vionville a French brigade charged a line of infantry supported by artillery, which had just captured a position. The cavalry lost over 50 per cent. and effected nothing.

At Sedan two French divisions charged a line of infantry supported by artillery and were destroyed.

Taking these three engagements together the French lost about 5,000 cavalry without doing the slightest harm to the German infantry and artillery, although they were armed with weapons long since obsolete.

The one instance on which the advocates of the charge *en masse* base their convictions is Bredow's charge at Vionville which broke through a French infantry division (plus three battalions) and eight batteries. It is to be noted, however, that this attack was made by a small force (5 $\frac{3}{4}$ squadrons); that owing to the ground it was a complete surprise; that the French infantry, who were in column, attempted to form squares instead of receiving the charge in line; that many of the men were so ill-trained that they did not know how to form square, and that some of the French batteries, when trying to get away, dashed into their own infantry. Nor did the charge, as was asserted at the time, stop the advance of the IIrd French Corps. The movement was suspended by order of the Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Bazaine.

Nevertheless, as I have already suggested, opportunities may still arise in which small bodies, such as squadrons and regiments, may effect surprises with *l'arme blanche*, and a bold charge may sometimes prove the best means of gaining time. But such opportunities will not often occur, and the cavalry as an almost universal rule will have to make use of its fire powers in order to render full support, both strategical and tactical, to the other arms. In the days of Napoleon cavalry was held back until it had a chance of charging. Now it can do so much towards the attainment of the superiority of fire that it will never be allowed to stand idle while a fight develops.

PURSUIT BY CAVALRY.

There has been no instance since the time of Napoleon of cavalry in masses riding down a demoralised army and causing enormous losses. During the Indian Mutiny, although the pursuing cavalry succeeded in capturing some guns, baggage, etc., notably at Agra and Cawnpore, the enemy's casualties were insignificant. In Afghanistan on no occasion were heavy losses inflicted by pursuing cavalry, the enemy managing to disperse or hide themselves in the neighbouring ravines. In European wars the cavalry have always been held off by fire, the truth being that retreating troops armed with the rifle and supported by guns do not become so demoralised as was sometimes the case in the days of the musket. Even after Omdurman the British and Egyptian cavalry were prevented from pursuing by the number of Arabs who retained their rifles and refused to fly.

Pursuit, when effective, has been carried out mainly by fire, and the cavalry has endeavoured to get ahead of the retreating infantry and guns to retard their progress and block their path with a strong line of rifles. It was by adopting these tactics that Sheridan's cavalry

brought about the dispersal of Early's Army on the Shenandoah in 1864 and the surrender of Lee's Army at Appomattox in 1865. In the former series of operations the cavalry fought in two pitched battles and drove the enemy back 130 miles in 9 days (19th to 27th September), capturing over 30 guns, 1,500 to 1,700 prisoners, and turning every position which the Confederates attempted to hold. The fighting was not all dismounted. During the battle of 19th September one division alone made six distinct charges, three against cavalry and three against infantry and artillery; but, as a rule, the fire-arm and the horse artillery gun were the decisive weapons.

Such tactics, which the powerful armament and defensive strength of the American cavalry made possible, are infinitely more effective than charges in mass with *l'arme blanche*. Their scope is far larger, their aim being the surrender of the enemy's whole force, and not merely the slaughter of a few hundred fugitives or the capture of a few batteries. Even in the days of Napoleon a pursuit like that of the Prussian cavalry after Waterloo was of the rarest occurrence. As a general rule the pursuing cavalry did not move off until the morning after the battle, and with modern arms it will often be possible for the defender to prolong his resistance until night-fall, and to retreat quickly under cover of darkness and his rear-guards. A direct pursuit with *l'arme blanche* will, therefore, be confined to small bodies. I may remark, however, that savages inhabiting mountains or jungle have a peculiar terror of horsemen and the cold steel, and against enemies of this character the lance may produce a great moral as well as material effect. As illustrating this, I would refer to the charges of the 11th Bengal Lancers at Chakdarra, in 1895, and of the 13th Bengal Lancers at Shabkadr, in 1897.

OBJECTIONS.

I will now refer to two objections which have been urged against the system of tactics I propose to introduce.

1. It is said that cavalry cannot be trained to fight indiscriminately on foot and in the saddle; that on foot they will be very indifferent infantry, and in the saddle very timid cavalry.
2. The South African war is brought forward as a proof that cavalry can very rarely effect a surprise.

As regards 1. The American cavalry were not only admirable when employed as dismounted skirmishers, but could always be trusted to charge home when mounted. Again, we teach our infantry two methods of fighting—attack and defence—and there is no difficulty in training them to be equally good in either situation. The fact that infantry are constantly practised in attacking positions does not in the slightest degree affect their powers of resistance when holding them.

The truth is that it is a matter of training and discipline. Intelligent men like our own are perfectly aware that sometimes dismounted tactics are best, and sometimes shock tactics; and while it is true that a timid leader, if dismounted tactics are constantly practised, will be more inclined to trust to fire than to a bold advance, it is certain that a timid leader will always lose opportunities, whether his command be mounted or on foot.

As regards 2. The chief peculiarity of the South African terrain was that it was essentially a mounted infantry and not a cavalry country. The great weaknesses of mounted infantry are its led horses and its impotence (owing to the want of *l'arme blanche*) when in movement.

Cavalry, on the other hand, rely upon surprise, and on its power of manœuvre to enable it to make full use of *l'arme blanche*; and although the bare plains of South Africa were peculiarly ill-adapted to these tactics, there were occasions, utilised oftener by the Boers than by ourselves, when startling surprises were effected. If opportunities offered in a country so open, how frequently would they be in a more undulating and wooded country, such as pertains to the greater part of Europe?

The conclusion, then, to be drawn from the above appears to me to be that cavalry will generally act dismounted, but that small bodies, such as brigades, regiments, and squadrons, may effect surprises against all arms by making use of shock tactics.

ARMAMENT AND EQUIPMENT.

It follows, therefore, that our cavalry should be armed with the most effective fire-arm, viz., the rifle; that their equipment should be adapted to skirmishing on foot over rough and wooded country; and that they should be supported by quick-firing horse artillery guns and by mounted infantry sufficiently well trained as to be able to make long and rapid marches without loss of efficiency.

The fire power of our cavalry should be developed to the utmost. It will then become an independent arm, capable of both attack and defence, and its tactical and strategical value will be immeasurably increased.

A more difficult question is the character of *l'arme blanche*. Is it to be lance or sword?

The advantages claimed for the former are:—

1. Its moral effect in the charge.
2. Its moral and material effect in pursuit.

Its disadvantages are:—

1. It is an encumbrance when scouting.
2. It is an encumbrance when dismounted.
3. It is inferior to the sword in the *mêlée*.
4. Fewer men per squadron can be dismounted.

Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?

That they do so is, in my opinion, exceedingly doubtful.

It is possible that cavalry carrying only the sword may deem themselves inferior in point of armament to cavalry carrying the lance; but this inferiority is neither everywhere acknowledged nor is it so great that a small superiority of numbers or of tactics would not redress the balance. In Austria, a strong party among the cavalry officers are against the lance, and it is stated by General von Czerlieu, who has made the question a special study, that military history has no instance of an entire front rank (of cavalry) being borne down by the lances of a charging enemy; and he adds that the moral impression supposed to be produced by the lance has never prevented swordsmen from

attacking lancers. The truth appears to be that whereas the lancer has a slight advantage at the first onset, the swordsman is his superior in the *mêlée*.

In the pursuit, as I have seen myself more than once, the lance is certainly superior to the sword; so superior that, if there were no fire-arms, I should find it very difficult to decide between the lance and the sword. But, as I have endeavoured to show, the rifle will henceforth be the cavalry soldier's principal weapon, and, to admit of a pursuit being undertaken, except by dismounted fire, troops must be demoralised to an extent that has never been seen upon a recent battle-field.

Is it then worth while to arm our cavalry with the cumbersome lance, and to detract from their efficiency as scouts and skirmishers, their primary and most important duties, in order that they may be able to take full advantage of opportunities which are of the rarest occurrence?

The question answers itself. For shock tactics, the armament of our cavalry should be the sword.

What we must then aim at is to make our cavalry expert rifle shots and swordsmen. To neither of these essentials has sufficient attention been paid hitherto.

With regard to the rifle, it is unnecessary to repeat what has been already published in a recent Army Order.¹ Careful attention to that order will, I am confident, result in a very considerable improvement in the musketry efficiency of our soldiers. We must now endeavour to obtain an equal improvement in the use of the sword, in which our men are far from being proficient.

There have been in the past several reasons to account for this:—

1. Insufficient training of the individual.
2. An unpractical "Sword Exercise," adapted to parade purposes only.
3. Indifferent instructors.
4. Steel scabbards.
5. An ill-balanced weapon.

Swordsmanship, like marksmanship, is only to be acquired by continual practice, by careful instruction of the individual, and by making him take an interest in his personal proficiency.

It is just as important that every cavalry officer should be a skilled swordsman as that every infantry officer should be a marksman. It is only the man who knows who can teach. At the same time, I do not think it necessary, or even wise, that the lance should be entirely discarded. It is well that the cavalry soldier should have a knowledge of all weapons which may be effectively used by the mounted man; and occasions may arise, particularly in campaigns against savages, who are ill-armed, or who have an innate fear of horsemen, when the lance may be the surest and speediest means of demoralising the enemy. Nor should it be overlooked that lance practice, especially tent-pegging, is, like the bayonet practice of the infantry, a most useful exercise, improving the seat on horseback, giving the man confidence, and strengthening his muscles. As military sports, tent-pegging, and lance *v.* bayonet should be encouraged in every way possible. They are for the men what polo is for the officers, the best and most wholesome

¹ No. 237, October, 1902.

method of employing their hours of recreation, the only proviso I would make being that on no account should they be allowed to encroach on the time given to field exercises, the study of ground, and serious work.

With the exception, then, that the rifle will be substituted for the carbine, the armament of the cavalry will remain as at present. The lance, however, will not be carried on guard, in the field, at manœuvres, or on active service. Practice in handling it will be given on exactly the same system as practice in handling the bayonet in the infantry.

It will be apparent that the cavalry, under these new conditions, becomes more than ever the arm which demands the highest training in both officers and men. It has many other duties to fulfil besides the charge. It has always been the arm on which a commander in the field is dependent for the success of his operations, and to-day armed with the rifle, its importance is far greater than heretofore. It is not only to a great extent the source of the information on which the commander bases his plans, but it prevents the enemy from gaining information; it makes surprise impossible, and it completes the victory. It is not too much to say that the fate of an engagement may rest on the good judgment and reports of a cavalry subaltern; and the issue of a campaign on the recognition and seizure of some strategic position by a cavalry brigadier.

The duties, therefore, of the cavalry officer are even more varied and not less difficult than those of the scientific corps. They require quite as much intelligence and practical knowledge for their fulfilment, and I do not hesitate to say that unless our cavalry is officered by the very best men we can find, physically and intellectually, we cannot hope to obtain useful results. Without first-rate cavalry leaders and thoroughly well-trained men good strategy is most difficult and decisive tactics almost impossible.



War Office.

1st March, 1903.